
TEACHING WORD STRESS AND INTONATION TO EFL LEARNERS**Guillaume Marie KANYANDU BETU**

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers EFL teachers some practical guidelines that may help them ease the teaching of word stress and intonation. The study shows that word stress and intonation are very significant for oral communication. It also justifies the choice of using RP rather than GA when teaching pronunciation to EFL learners in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Some prerequisites to the teaching of pronunciation are similarly provided before suggesting how teachers may handle to teach word stress and intonation to EFL learners. As for the teaching of word stress, the teacher should select words of which the stress placement cause problems, put them in a sentence, utter the sentence and make them repeat by the learners first in chorus and then individually. Afterwards, the teacher pronounces the word in isolation at least three times and ask the learners to repeat it first in chorus and then individually. He will then present other words of the same family and induce the rule if necessary. Concerning the teaching of intonation, the use of chorus and individual pronunciation, gestures, and the blackboard will help the teacher indicate the different types of intonation.

Keywords: Word Stress, Intonation, Chorus and Individual Pronunciation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of pronunciation is considered as a challenge for most EFL teachers and pronunciation has turned out to be the most thought-provoking skill or sub skill to be taught to EFL learners. Moreover, the failure of several adult second language learners to attain know-how in pronunciation has frequently fascinated linguists. In this paper, we would like to give some practical guidelines one may take into consideration while teaching English stress and intonation. The objective of this paper is to highpoint the importance of correct stress and intonation in teaching EFL learners, provide some suggestions for teaching stress and intonation to EFL learners and eventually present how an English teacher may proceed to teach English stress and intonation to fresh learners. For this purpose, the use of the qualitative approach has helped us to get a clear perspective into the issue.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW**2.1 The Significance of Word Stress and Intonation in English Language Learning**

In fact, second language pronunciation researchers such as Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin (1996), McNerney & Mendelsohn (1992) state that “assigning importance to English suprasegmental features maximizes learners’ intelligibility”. In addition, Nabila Zuhairy et al (2024:159) assert that “suprasegmental features in English play a role in conveying nuances, emotions, and meaning in speech.”

As a matter of fact, word stress is a suprasegmental feature that influences sentence structure and meaning in English. In other words, the stress pattern can affect the pronunciation of the entire statement or utterance

as in the case of the sequence of vowels and consonants, everything depending on its location. The present case may be shown for instance in the word 'present' (noun) pronounced with the stress on the first syllable, meaning a gift. On the other hand, when it is a verb, it is pronounced with the stress on the second syllable. The stress has shifted and hence this phenomenon automatically affects both the quality of some segments in the utterance and the pronunciation of the whole utterance. The above example shows that segments in a word are closely related to the stress pattern of that word for its identification. Indeed, in the scope of this work, the interest is accurately and particularly put upon the stress pattern on polysyllabic words. Brown (1977) quoted by Kanyandu (2020:) tries to justify this interest when he points out that: "the stress pattern on polysyllabic words is a very important identifying feature of the word which must not be regarded as an adjunct to a correctly pronounced sequence of consonants and vowels but as the essential framework within which the consonants and vowels are related"

As for the importance of intonation in English learning, Nabila Zuhairy et al., (2024:158) argue that not only is intonation a major suprasegmental feature in English phonology but also the intonation patterns used in speech can convey specific pragmatic information and helps in marking clauses, turning statements into questions, or indicating uncertainty. In addition, the intonation patterns used in word stress can illustrate the relationships between words in a sentence, emphasize key words, or make utterances more expressive. Bret Ordonez Yates (2024) also asserts that "intonation plays a vital role in communication. It can change the meaning of a sentence, convey emotions, and indicates the speaker's attitude". In other words, intonation is a fundamental feature of English that goes beyond ordinary pronunciation. It impacts significance, expresses feelings, improves comprehension and interactions. In her turn, Rana Zulfugarova (2018:18) states that "the most important functions of intonation are to distinguish types of sentences (statements, questions, commands, requests) and to divide sentences into sense groups." Kanyandu (2019:44) goes along with the preceding view when notes that the suprasegmental aspects such as stress and intonation may alter largely or considerably the temperamental impact of what we hear. They also make the difference subtle between a polite request and an abrupt demand, that is, for instance, a question may be interpreted as a statement of fact if pronounced with incorrect pronunciation and as a result a communication breakdown occurs.

Furthermore, Eskenazi (1999: 66-67), , argues that below a certain level, even if grammar and vocabulary are completely correct, effective communication cannot take place without correct pronunciation because poor phonetics and prosody can distract the listener and impede comprehension of the message.

In few words "if the students can be well versed in supra-segmental features, they can speak English fluently and can convey their attitudes, feelings, emotions, etc. in an appropriate and meaningful way" (Rabin Kumar Das, 2023::662)

2.2 The Choice of Models of Pronunciation in English Language Learning

Of course, as asserted by Donald (1978: VII), when one wishes to write a manual on pronunciation for a language to be studied in a classroom and especially when that language is English, one of the unavoidable problems he has to meet is that of the choice of the dialect to be taught for English is a language that is largely spoken over vast areas of the world. Thus as suggested by O'Connor (1980) and Brown (1974, 1977) cited by Kanyandu (2019), the most sensible thing to do when being faced to such a problem is to choose as a model the sort of English that the learner is likely to hear most often. From what precedes comes out the question "what form of pronunciation is to be taken into account as a model for both Congolese learners

and teachers of English?" This question seems crucial since English is learned in the Democratic Republic of Congo as a foreign language and therefore is not used for everyday communication. To answer this question, Gimson (1981:301) gives decisive criteria upon which the choice of any teaching model must be based. He states that this basic model should: - have work currency - be widely and readily understood, - be adequately described in textbooks and have ample recorded materials available for learners. These criteria being accounted for, the choice is effectively between Received Pronunciation (RP), the accepted social standard of pronunciation in Britain and General American (GA), "the type of pronunciation that has the best claim in American as asserted by Kuryatnikova et al (1993). Although GA is now completely accepted in Britain (Gimson, 1981), most Congolese learners and teachers of English still stick to the long-standing tradition of learning or teaching English that is based on the Received Pronunciation for not only does it reflect international intelligibility but also as Brown (1977) cited by Katsuva (1987:234) argues that RP is the only accent of which several segmented and international descriptions are readily available, it is the accent which is most usually taken as a model for foreign students and finally, it is the accent towards which many educated speakers of other accents tend to. In brief, within the scope of our research, the RP model is chosen rather than GA for it takes into account both aspects of oral communication, i.e., understanding what you are listening (comprehensibility) and making yourself understood (intelligibility), which should be aimed at in teaching pronunciation. Furthermore, in DRC, materials foreseen in the English national curriculum are presented on the basis of RP, that is, the choice of RP model agrees with the official textbook policy in DRC developed by the Ministry of Education.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Approach

This research uses a mixed method approach in that it uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The term "mixed method" is used in this study to refer to all procedures of collecting and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data in the context of a single study (Driscoll et al. 2007). The research design consists of a combination of data forms during the collection stage. The mixed method model that is used during the data analysis stage is merging. The content of the recordings and tests are analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The merging model is also used at the reporting of findings stage. As a matter of fact both quantitative and qualitative methods constitute alternative strategies for research, and quantitative as well as qualitative data can be collected in the same study.

3.2 Research methods

This work uses the content document analysis method and the descriptive method. The content document analysis enables us to look at the content of the different answers from the questionnaire submitted to subjects. The descriptive method is used to analyze and quantify different answers given by the subjects.

3.3. Participants

The target population of this research is the teachers of English includes in the town of Kananga, a town in the centre of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The subjects to be selected for our research have to have the competence to teach English in EFL secondary schools when they are taking part in our study.

Ten EFL teachers, participating in this investigation, are selected through purposive sampling. Their selection is based on qualification and experience, that is, participant have to be qualified

English teachers having taught English for at least five years. They are enrolled in secondary schools where they are teaching English as a foreign language.

4. DATA PRESENTATION

To conduct this research, data which could provide us with some insights into the teaching of word stress and intonation by our subjects are needed. Hence, the data consist of answering questions from a questionnaire we submitted to our subjects. In a nutshell, the collected data about the teaching of word stress and intonation by our subjects may be summarized as follows:

<i>Teachers' Degree</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>%</i>
Graduates	10/10	100
Undergraduates	00/10	00
TOTAL	10/10	100 %
<i>Teaching pronunciation competence</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>%</i>
YES	02/10	20 %
NO	80/10	80 %
TOTAL	10/10	100 %
<i>Teaching pronunciation frequency</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>%</i>
Occasionally	10/10	100 %
Systematically	00/10	00 %
TOTAL	10/10	100 %
<i>Teaching Experience Span</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>%</i>
Less than five years	00/10	00 %
5 years	01/10	10 %
6 years	00/10	00 %
7 years	01/10	10 %
8 years	00/10	00 %
9 years	00/10	00 %
10 years	00/10	00 %
More than 10 Years	07/10	70 %
TOTAL	10/10	100 %
<i>Learners' appreciation in pronunciation</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>%</i>
Very Good	00/10	00 %
Good	03/10	30 %
Satisfactory	03/10	30 %
Poor	03/10	40 %
Very Poor	00/10	00 %
TOTAL	10/10	100 %

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from the questionnaire submitted to our subjects are analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. As the study design is descriptive, the core analysis is the description of all identified observations. Hence, each observation is described either qualitatively or quantitatively. After being coded, collected observations are turned into a set of significant logical types.

To the questions asked to our subjects, we noticed that the ten teachers we have selected for

our research were all graduates and the majority (70 %) have been teaching English for more than ten years. Their answers reveal that only two teachers out of ten have been taught to teach pronunciation but do not teach pronunciation systematically. They teach pronunciation occasionally and mainly when a learner mispronounces a word or an utterance with inappropriate stress or intonation. As for the stress, they pronounce the word and make their learners repeat as quickly as possible since the lesson itself is not about pronunciation but rather about another skill or sub skill such as vocabulary, reading, grammar, etc. that is, word stress and intonation are taught through feedback. As for the learner's appreciation in pronunciation, our subjects' responses show that only thirty percent of their learners have a good pronunciation, thirty percent have a satisfactory pronunciation, and forty percent have a poor pronunciation. The difficulty they encounter is mainly the fact that they have not been taught how to teach pronunciation. In addition they miss appropriate books on pronunciation and other teaching aids as audio visual materials, etc. In addition, their learners practice English only during English class. To solve this problem, we found it better to provide some prerequisites for the teaching of pronunciation and suggestions on how word stress and intonation may be taught systematically to EFL learners.

5.1. Preconditions for Teaching Stress and Intonation to EFL Learners

Here below, we shall make recourse to prerequisites for teaching pronunciation to EFL learners provided by Kanyandu (2019: 46-47). To begin with, some fundamentals in the teaching of pronunciation should be taken into consideration before speaking of the real teaching of stress and intonation.

5.1.1. Teachers' Training

Quoted by Abbas Pourhosein Gilakjani (2012: 119), Fraser (2000) stated that ESL/EFL teachers need to be provided with courses and materials to help them improve their effectiveness in teaching pronunciation. In fact, to teach stress and intonation, teachers should possess, a good knowledge of phonetics and phonology. Not only do they need to be quite knowledgeable in the area of speech production but also in the area of speech perception. In speech perception, we focus on how we perceive or hear the words or utterances, which basically affect the manner in which we produce these words or utterance. Indeed, to cope successfully with the teaching of English stress and intonation, it is required that the teacher be well trained. The teacher should have an ear trained to recognize the distinction between rising and falling intonation if he is going to correct stress and intonation, to detect or perceive and discriminate the stress or intonation of the new language. Furthermore, the teacher must be able to see the mistake as well as he hears it or the correction will be in vain. Once you determine the cause of error, which is often attributed to the influence of the students' L1, then you're able to diagnose and instruct accurately and effectively. Mention should also be made of knowing what kinds of errors should be corrected and when they should be corrected. Of course, in language education, we suggest that errors that impair intelligibility of a message should have top priority for correction. To the question of when and how these pronunciation errors should be corrected, Holly and King provide the answer according to which teachers should allow the learner to complete his statement although it is incorrect. They should be patient, tolerant and flexible as well. In other words, the teacher should ignore errors in pronunciation while the learner is engaged in oral communicative language work. The learner should not be interrupted for correction will inhibit his fluency in speaking. Thus correction of pronunciation should be done in a general way some minutes after the language activity.

5.1.2. Teachers' use of appropriate teaching aids.

Another prerequisite in teaching pronunciation is the didactic material. Unquestionably, like vocabulary or grammar lessons, a pronunciation lesson needs didactic materials among which drawings, gestures, pronouncing dictionary, tapes, records, films, CD, video and language laboratory. Indeed, tapes, records, films video, and language laboratory offer the learners an opportunity to be brought directly into contact with the authentic native pronunciation and hence compare their own pronunciation with that of the native speaker.

5.1.3. Learners' input and output

Lien To Trinh (2021: 289) states that “extensive input and output practice is significantly crucial in language learning. This can facilitate language learners in terms of mastering the target language effectively and sufficiently.”

5.1.4. SL learners' different sources of input.

Input “refers to the samples of the oral or written language a learner is exposed to” and is considered as the “data that learners have to work with to construct their interlanguage” (Ellis, 2015: 25). Celce-Murcia et al (1996: 18) suggested that the optimal situation would be to learn from many different native teachers, thus exposure to different kinds of input. As for Cook (1996: 130), all types of input are beneficial: teacher's language, conversation CDs, advertisements from television and magazines, DVDs, other students' interlanguage, train time-tables, etc. Thus, language may come first from the teacher providing students with authentic language, defined as “language constructed to fulfil some social purpose in the language community” (Cook, 1996: 123). Exercises and courses had then to turn away from specially constructed classroom language (non-authentic language) to pieces of language that had been really used by native speakers (authentic language). Furthermore, an English environment should be created to allow learners overcome some of their pronunciation difficulties. Thus, apart from the classroom where learners are exposed to the target language, the exposure to English pronunciation can be achieved by creating English clubs of which teachers, learners and any speaker of English are members. Thus learners will be exposed to the target language through different English club activities such as debates, parties, conferences, films, theatre, etc.

5.1.5. SL learners' production of large quantities of output

In fact, producing language serves second language acquisition in several ways. For instance, it enhances accuracy and fluency. According to research, learners need opportunities to practice language at their level of English language competency. This practice with English-speaking peers is called Comprehensible Output. Many researchers feel that comprehensible output is nearly as important as input. Cooperative learning groups are one way for new learners of English to receive plenty of understandable input and output.

5.1.6. SL learners' reception of good feedback

Indeed, SL learners should feel at ease in the SL classroom. According to Eskenazi (1999:73), student's confidence can be increased by correcting them only when necessary, reinforcing good pronunciation, and avoiding negative feedback. Therefore, one to one instruction is beneficial as it allows students to practice in front of the teacher alone, until they are comfortable with the newly-acquired sounds. Adapting feedback to the amount of interruption that each student can tolerate is another way to avoid discouraging active production and to obtain better results from correction. When learners are forced to produce sounds that do not

exist in their native language in front of their peers, they tend to lose self-confidence (Eskenazi, 1999:73). As a result, they may stop trying to acquire SL pronunciation relying on FL sounds. Adult learners need to feel self-confident and motivated in order to produce new sounds without inhibition. Learners who are ill at ease have a higher risk of performing poorly, or even abandoning the phonological component completely.

5.2. The Teaching of English Word Stress and Intonation

One of the first issues that must be taken into account when trying to teach word stress and intonation in the classroom is that there is not just one method for teaching languages. The teacher has to adapt his methods and techniques according to several elements, such as the age of the students, the goals of the class, the material available for activities, etc. In the case of oral skills strengthening or pronunciation classes, the teacher should have a special operative approach to show the students the precise placement of stress in words and the exact intonation of an utterance, together with recordings of native speakers, stress and intonation practice.

Gimson (1981) argues that the teaching of pronunciation presents particular difficulties for pronunciation as it does not permit a progressive treatment since all phonetic or phonological features are potentially present from the very first lesson. However apart from occasional teaching pronunciation through lessons such as vocabulary and grammar, the teacher should present and practice systematically pronunciation features, among which stress word and intonation, as he introduces other aspects of the language.

As far as stress is concerned, Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983:119) state that the position of the stress within a word needs to be learned as a part of pronunciation of that word for it may be the feature upon which the meaning of that word depends.

Herein, we are going to attempt to provide some general considerations and techniques that may be useful while teaching word stress and intonation of the English language to EFL learners.

As to the presentation of the stress, the teacher must select the words and present them in context, which words must be included in sentences or dialogues. Lewis and Hill (1985:67) in their turn provide the way in which words must be taught. According to them, the teacher should make use of choral pronunciation for it serves to bring the class together. They suggest that the ideal solution is what they call "choral and individual pronunciation" (c.i.p.). That is to say the class repeats in chorus the model pronunciation provided by the teacher and thereafter the teacher asks learners to reproduce it individually. Savannah Potter (2025) goes along with this suggestion by asserting that "there's nothing better for memory and developing verbal skills than repetition while teaching suprasegmentals in the ESL classroom."

Brown (2014) claims that the majority of pronunciation features of a second language can be learned by imitation, hence like the teaching of sounds, the first stage in teaching stress is pure imitation, repetition of the teacher's model in chorus and individually (Haycraft, 1986:208). The process is to repeat the whole phrase, isolate and repeat only the stressed syllable and finally the whole phrase. The teacher makes use of gestures and the blackboard to indicate the stress. He may for instance clap the hands to indicate the stressed syllables. Furthermore, the teacher may use the blackboard to make the pronunciation point visible to the class. Without writing on the board, the teacher may indicate the stress pattern by using symbols (Haycraft, 1986:208).

e.g. a) -----/-----
 b) ○ ○ ○ good evening
 c) □ □ □

On the other hand, the above symbols may be written above or below the phrase.

□ □ □
 e.g. good evening
 □ □ □

Haycraft (1986:218) adds that the stressed syllables may also be underlined, written in capital letters or coloured chalk.

As far as I am concerned, to teach the stress as already mentioned in the abstract, the teacher should select words of which the stress placement cause problems, put them in a sentence, utter the sentence and make them repeat by the learner in chorus and individually. Afterwards, the teacher pronounces the word in isolation at least three times and ask the learners to repeat it first in chorus and then individually. He will then present other words of the same finally and induce the rule if necessary, this is done at the presentation stage. As a matter of fact, to practice words stress, it is better to classify words according to the position of their stress.

Below, is a model of how stress can be taught systematically following the above different steps. Let's consider the case words ending in -ics (-ic) having the stress on the penultimate:

Teacher Activity

We have physics today.

What do we have today?

The teacher asks learners to interact

Listen: physics (three times insisting on the stressed syllable).

Listen and repeat: physics (three times).

The teacher writes the sentence on the board and underlines the stressed syllable or write it in colour

Mr Amunde teaches mathematics

What does Amunde teach?

Now listen: mathematics (three times).

Listen and repeat: mathematics (three times).

He writes the sentence on the board.

Ntumba likes electronics

What does Ntumba like?

Now listen: electronics (three times).

Listen and repeat: electronics (three times).

Tadianga is a mechanic

What is Tadianga?

Now listen: mechanic (three times).

Listen and repeat: mechanic (three times).

He writes the sentence on the board.

Learner Activity

We have physics today.

they interact as they do in other lessons such as vocabulary and grammar

Learners listen

They listen and repeat (three times).

Amunde teaches mathematics.

Interactions among learners

Learners listen

They listen and repeat (three times).

Ntumba likes electronics

Interactions among learners

Learners listen

They listen and repeat (three times).

Tadianga is a mechanic

Interactions among learners

Learners listen

They listen and repeat (three times).

Our country is a **republic**.

What is our country?

Now listen: **republic**.

c (three times).

Listen and repeat: r **republic**.

(three times).

He writes the sentence on the board

Our republic is **democratic**

How is our republic?

Now listen: **democratic** (three times).

Listen and repeat: **democratic** (three times).

He writes the sentence on the board

Our country is a **republic**.

Interactions among learners

Learners listen

They listen and repeat (three times).

Our republic is **democratic**

Interactions among learners

Learners listen

They listen and repeat (three times).

The teacher may at this stage ask learners to find out which syllable is stressed in the presented words and induce the rule: words ending in –ics or –ic bear the stress on the last but one syllable called the penultimate. He will also tell there are some exceptions to this rule in words such as: **politics**, **catholic**, etc. with the stress on the first syllable.

As the summary is already been made through the above presentation stage, the teacher will ask learners to read it before writing it down (this is the controlled practice stage):

- We have today **physics**
- Amunde teaches **mathematics**
- Ntumba likes **electronics**
- Tadianga is a **mechanic**
- Our country is a **republic**
- Our **republic** is **democratic**

At the Free Practice stage, learners are asked to provide examples of other words ending –ics or –ic that bear the stress on the penultimate.

Finally, the teacher provides feedback.

Intonation

As a matter of fact, intonation is also phonemic and knowledge of its use is of primary importance since the attitudes of speakers are often interpreted (Finocchiaro et al, 1983: 120). Regarding the teaching of intonation, the use of gestures and the blackboard will help the teacher indicate the rising or falling intonation. Haycraft (1986:221) says that a sweep of the arm from high to low will indicate the falling tune and from low to high the rising tune. On the other hand, Lewis and Hill (1985:73) argue that the teaching of intonation is usually most effective when the teacher uses the simplest method of presentation. He may, for instance, give a model and indicate the pitch by movements of the hand, or by simple arrow drawings on the blackboard.

The above principle is clear from the two different intonations of the single word: sorry.

^

Sorry! (Apology)
(Lewis et al, 1983:73)

↗

sorry? (Please repeat)

Below, is the way how intonation can be taught systematically following different steps. Let's consider the case of falling intonation.

The teacher utter each statement, information question, commands, question tag, or exclamation twice or thrice using gestures to indicate the falling intonation. He asks his learners repeat the utterance first in chorus and then individually. He then asks which kind of utterance it is, and tells them that such or such an utterance is pronounced with falling intonation. At the end, he induces the rule as follows: "The falling intonation is commonly used in statements, wh-question (information questions), commands, confirmatory tag questions and exclamations". It is indicated by a downward arrow.

The teacher presents utterances as follows:

- Statements

Examples: I'm very glad to meet you. ↘
 He doesn't work at the bank anymore. ↘
 Bill has bought a new car. ↘
 Beer has no problem with the individual ↘.

- wh-questions or information questions.

Examples: Where do you live? ↘
 What's your name? ↘
 Why are you sad? ↘
 Who is singing over there? ↘
 When will you travel abroad? ↘
 How are you doing? ↘
 Which colour would you like? ↘

- Commands

Examples: Sit down here. ↘
 Take off your hat ↘
 Write your name here. ↘
 Be quick. ↘

- Questions tags

He speaks English, doesn't he? ↘
 She is stupid, isn't she? ↘
 He didn't succeed, did he? ↘
 It doesn't matter, does it? ↘

- Exclamations

What a beautiful baby! ↘
 This is a ⁺surprise! ↘
 How wonderful it was! ↘

Eventually, the teacher provides word stress and intonation exercises and feedback.

6. CONCLUSION

Obviously, pronunciation is a very challenging field for a foreign language learner to acquire for each language has its own characteristics. From this standpoint, the problems or difficulties are related to the nonexistence of some features that do not have counterparts in the source language. To teach word stress, the teacher should select words of which the stress placement cause problems, put them in a sentence, utter the sentence and make it repeat by the learner in chorus and individually. Afterwards, the teacher pronounces the word in isolation at least three

times and ask the learners to repeat it first in chorus and then individually. The selected word should be put in a context. The teacher insists on stressed syllable and uses the teaching aids. He asks learners to interact and then builds the summary as in all other lessons. As for the intonation, the teacher utters each statement, information question, commands, question tag, or exclamation twice or thrice using gestures to indicate the appropriate intonation. He asks his learners repeat the utterance first in chorus and then individually. During the controlled and free practices, in addition to reading the summary, the teacher asks his learners to provide sentences containing the learned feature. Indeed, we believe that if strategies are used with delicacy and with teaching aids, they may possibly be supportive in teaching the word stress and intonation to EFL learners.

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